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ABSTRACT

Part of a large study in Tanzania, a study provides a broad context of obstacles to literacy, particularly those affecting migratory subpopulation groups. Subjects, 480 adults who participated in national literacy programs and belonged to one of two communities of the Maasai, were interviewed. The first group--the Maasai of Longido--represent a section of the pastoral community with a high degree of nomadism. The second group--the Maasai of Monduli--show a lower degree of nomadism with more literacy gains, but nevertheless fall far behind compared to the settled neighbors. Data were collected on migration patterns, family uses of literacy, design and flow of information and knowledge in the pastoral community, and sources of information about drought, livestock diseases, and family health. Preliminary results indicated that: (1) ages of those interviewed ranged from 18 to 79 years; (2) one-third did not attend formal schooling at all; (3) participation and attendance at literacy classes was minimal; (4) attending class meant walking long distances; (5) newspapers, leaflets, posters were rarely seen in the local shops or markets; (6) books were rarely used outside the context of school; (7) local traditional learning systems were closely linked to the Maasai community's survival needs; and (8) the practice of nomadism was an esteemed lifestyle by the Maasai. Findings suggest that the Maasai's social, cultural, and political environment exerts considerable influence on their everyday literacy practice, and that imposition of alien educational systems may have alienated the Maasai. (Contains 38 references; two charts listing migrant societies and pastoral nomads societies are attached.) (RS)

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The Social and Political Context of Literacy Education for Pastoral Societies: The Case of the Maasai of Tanzania

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THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF LITERACY EDUCATION FOR PASTORAL SOCIETIES: THE CASE OF THE MAASAI OF TANZANIA

The past three decades have witnessed increasing efforts by governments and international agencies to provide basic education and literacy programs in developing countries (World Bank, 1988; Unesco, 1961). In spite of these efforts, pockets of difficult to reach migratory subpopulations remain largely untouched by basic education programs (Nkinyangi, 1981; Goldschmidt, 1980). Recent national assessments of primary school enrollments and literacy programs have shown modest gains in basic education and literacy skills of urban populations and their children, but rural, migratory and transient groups remain on the fringes of access to schooling and literacy programs (Graham-Brown, 1991). Recognizing the many forms of migration and the multitude of groups involved with this lifestyle worldwide, this paper presents a report of research in progress which covers one nomadic pastoralist people, the Maasai of Tanzania (See Appendix A). An examination of the social and political context of this "nation on the move" provides a description of existing literacy programs and the extent to which nomadic pastoralism hinders or accounts for everyday use of literacy skills. Such description will contribute to background information needed to develop methodologies to understand how migratory groups acquire, use and retain literacy skills. The assumption is that analysis of practice of literacy among the Maasai will permit a reflection on the failure of previous educational programs and predict Maasai's receptivity to Tanzania's future literacy programs. It is also conceivable that the case of the Maasai can serve as a pilot to design further studies of migratory populations in a comparative and broader scale.

The Context of Nomadic Pastoralism

Nomadic pastoralism is a widespread phenomenon in many parts of Africa. Cattle herding is a prevalent mode of life practiced by the cattle people of East Africa and the Sahelian

groups of West Africa (See Appendix B). The Maasai of East Africa form one of the largest nomadic pastoralist groups in Africa. Found in Kenya and Tanzania along the Rift Valley, the Maasai compete for pastures with other nomadic groups found in the region. These include: the Karamojong of Uganda, the Samburu of Kenya, the Turkana of Northern Kenya, the Mursi and Borana of Ethiopia, the Fulani of Nigeria and other Sahelian nomads found in Burkina-Faso, Sudan, Niger, Gabon, Mali, and Chad.

The Maasai occupy a large territory in Tanzania consisting of the districts of Arusha, Ngorongoro, and Kiteto. In the colonial era, this area was known as Maasailand which was specially created under the 1902 Special Districts Ordinance. I first made contacts with this group of pastoralists in 1988-89 during a survey on postliteracy in Tanzania. Participants were interviewed about taking part in literacy classes, out-of-school uses of literacy, and use of communication media (reading newspapers or listening to radio). Retention of knowledge and literacy skills over a period of time subsequent to participation in literacy classes was elicited two ways, through "reading aloud" and writing tests. The findings of this survey showed that despite impressive gains of literacy nationwide, migratory groups like the nomadic Maasai had low participation rates. The rate of retention of knowledge in this subpopulation was below the national average. While the Tanzania literacy rate climbed to 89 percent in 1988, the Maasai and other migratory groups like the Datoga, Hadzabe and Ndorobo, scored below the 35 percent literacy rate (Semali, 1991, 1993). The reason for low rates for members of this subpopulation is not fully understood.

Earlier studies of similar groups used data derived from the national register, census data and probability sample studies. Such survey research techniques examined access to schooling, participation rates in literacy programs, and social mobility (Court & Kinyanjui, 1980; King, 1972). However, overall this unique subpopulation has not been studied as a unit of analysis. Instead, the nomadic Maasai have been included in national surveys and comparative studies which have

not permitted the examination of nomadism as a subculture or as a critical variable which impacts the outcomes of educational endeavors.

Interest in pastoral people hinges on political and ecological rationales (Galaty & Salzman, 1981). Politically, pastoralists are regarded as a marginal segment of society. In Tanzania, nomadic pastoralists form about one fifth of the population. They use more than one third of available land for pastures. In Kenya, for example, recent land reforms and destocking regulations are contentious because on the one hand they are seen as controlling environmental degradation, while on the other hand such regulations are outrightly encroaching pastoralist rights and depriving them of their traditional land (Weekly, June 15, 1992). Ecologically, pastoral populations are viewed as critical due to environmental pressure and ecological disasters brought about by overgrazing and overstocking. Economically, pastoralists have been categorized as the poorest groups in their respective countries; infant mortality rates are high; they have severe nutritional deficiencies and they have high rates of illiteracy. For these reasons, pastoralists have become "target populations" of many international relief and support services (Galaty & Salzman, 1981; Sandiford, 1976). It is estimated that pastoralists face a more severe deficiency of quality of life because they live a nomadic life and are in constant movement with their cattle. Social services like health care, safe water, roads, and schools are difficult and expensive to provide in nomadic situations.

In these circumstances how can the Maasai acquire, use and retain literacy skills? How do you motivate nomads to stay literate? To be realistic any serious plans undertaken to provide educational opportunities for all citizens must include these migratory subpopulations. It is rightly argued that the crucial importance of basic education, particularly literacy programs for all citizens, is seen crucial for the development of a nation. The provision of education is perceived by planners as a means of promoting social change. Without basic education, individuals are limited to marginal existence in rapidly changing technological societies, and have

no hope of developing their understanding of the human condition, discovering their talents, and enhancing their ability to create wealth. The objectives of basic education for nomads, in the view of planners, are reflected in the curriculum of schools. This curriculum, which is taken from the national syllabus, consists of reading, writing, math, language skills, history and geography among other subjects. Taken together these subjects promote the idea of a literate person, which is recognized as an important process of bringing about social change and integration. The way knowledge is constructed and the context in which schools dispense such body of knowledge is another matter. The perspective of social change and how it occurs among nomads raises difficult yet essential questions: Must nomads settle? Should education lead to permanent settlement? Which education programs serve best to educate people for development without destroying their cultural heritage and cultural pride? These problems, coupled with regional inequalities of access to schooling, and limited educational resources, make nomadic pastoralism even more elusive to many educators. It is in this context that the current project was conceptualized and carried out.

The Maasai as a Community

The Maasai (namely the Maa speaking group), as a community, consist of two distinct groups. Between these two groups are to be found many other related subgroups who have emerged through intermarriage, or as a result of being absorbed as captives into the Maasai community. During the pre-colonial years the Maasai conquered their neighbors as a way to expand their grazing areas. After the invasion of the Europeans, such incursions continued through to the post-independence days. The first group comprises of people who practice some agriculture. In the center of this group are found people like the Ilarusa (Waarusha) in Northern Tanzania. Further out in this circle are people like Ilbaraguyu. Some early accounts by missionaries and European travellers in East Africa referred to them as Wakwavi. They migrate

and move around to occupy the northeast part of Tanzania, extending across the northern border as far as the Kajiado District in neighboring Kenya. Due to cattle disease and scarcity of pastures, this group sometimes engages in agriculture even though their preference is pastoralism.

The second group consists of the strictly nomadic pastoralist Maasai. This group leads a pastoral mode of life, and all of them are cattle keepers except where drought and cattle disease prevent them from practicing pastoralism exclusively. In order to provide for their large herds of livestock, the nomadic Maasai are constantly on the move in search of pastures and water. Sometimes they are forced to migrate because of ensuing conflicts with neighbors or simply to avoid cattle disease-ridden areas. Within the body of the Maasai are the following sections: Iloitai, Ildamat, Ilpurko, Isiria, Ilwuasin-Kishu, Imoitanik, Iloodokelani, Ilkankere, Ilmatapato, Ilkisonko, and Isikirari. Also within this body of the Maasai are Isampur who are geographically isolated by their location in the north east of Kenya. As a people, the Maasai continue to demonstrate a closely connected community with rich customs, oral traditions and history (Sankan, 1972).

Obstacles to Literacy Practice

Attempts to define literacy in Africa began with the early introduction of schools. For a long time the context of literacy, namely ability to read and write, was limited to schools and only a few elite were privileged to acquire this skill. In Tanzania, the expansion of literacy education for all citizens began in the early 1970s. Designed as a national literacy campaign, literacy education was made available to all children through a universal primary education program and to adults through mass education programs (Nyerere, 1971, 1985). During this period, the notion of literacy grew beyond the ability to read, write, and count. Other considerations were added to include ability to talk, seek information in one's own language, democratic participation and

ability to solve problems. Besides, as the definition of literacy expanded, so did the motivations for acquiring literacy skills. Economic gains have often been cited as an important reason for seeking to be literate. It has equally been argued that lack of literacy skills limits the ability to change and mobilize populations for an increasingly interdependent and complex technological world (Lasway 1989; Ouane 1990). However, evaluation of literacy programs in Tanzania indicates that not all citizens have acquired and retained literacy knowledge at the acceptable levels (Semali, 1991). Economic gains have not motivated some subpopulations to achieve high scores of literacy. The Maasai and other migratory groups scored below national averages.

Many educators argue that literacy education for the Maasai is hampered by historical, demographic, cultural and institutional factors (Ntiri, 1993). Historical obstacles include the legacy of the colonial educational systems introduced to Tanzania and the rest of Africa in the colonial period. The effects of this legacy are still persistent today and are so ingrained that they have defied years of educational reform. Initially, the colonial education did not favor expanding education to all citizens. The goal was to develop a small cadre of administrators to assume subservient roles in the colonial structure (Bray et al, 1986). Nomadic groups like the Maasai were not among those trained for such positions. In fact, the Maasai were more or less left alone to develop along their own lines, Maasailand being a closed district under the 1902 Special Districts Ordinance (Sankan, 1972). In the past, this policy limited any contact between Maasailand and the outside world which might have inspired social change among the Maasai. This discrimination was addressed by the post-independence government of Tanzania (Nyerere, 1968). In spite of these reforms, glaring differences continue to exist today. Exclusion is still a threat, ignited by old resentments, fanned by self-serving district rulers or misplaced ideology.

Other obstacles to literacy have persisted in the region. These include differences in demographic compositions, population growth, and geographic location of subpopulations. Unfortunately, these barriers have not been considered effectively when planning literacy

programs or even reflected in literacy statistics. Remote areas and other difficult to reach subpopulations have not been given equal attention as their urban counterparts and their situation remains largely unchanged. These differences are compounded by cultural and language issues. Van Dyken (1990) argues that "the continent's limited literacy is related to the degree to which the mother tongue has been ignored in favor of the international colonial languages." Little progress has been made towards the use of languages of subpopulations in literacy programs. The only example known is the case of Ethiopia using five local languages in its 1979 literacy campaign, which brought outstandingly good results (Cairns, 1989). The decision to use Swahili, the national language of Tanzania, in the national literacy campaigns of 1977-85 has received praise from many educators. However, the impact or efficacy of the use of such a national language on subpopulations has not been critically examined.

African educators are encouraged by recent emphasis of local languages in basic education as materials are developed and made available to schools. Since the early 1980s several books have been written in Maasai language to join the ranks of mostly religious texts -- hymn books and the bible -- introduced earlier by missionaries. But despite the demonstrated successful use of African national languages, like Swahili, for literacy most African nations continue to rely on French, English and Portuguese as both the official and essential languages for education and literacy. If this trend continues, how can the indigenous oral traditions and verbal discourse that are at the core of an African cultures become part of African literacy environment?

Theoretical Framework

Relying on data from a larger field research being conducted in Tanzania, the present study attempts to provide a broad context of obstacles to literacy, particularly those affecting migratory subpopulation group. The questions I have raised are first central to the debate on

access and equity of educational opportunity (Bowles, 1990; Court & Kinyanjui, 1980; World Bank, 1980). Secondly, the declaration on Education for All (EFA) Conference in Jomtien, March 5-9, 1990, provides the rationale and significance of this study. The challenging goals of EFA are self explanatory. They consist in offering quality primary education to all children and increasing the number and relevance of basic education and literacy activities for out-of-school youths and adults (Colclough, & Lewin, 1993). Furthermore, this study draws its conceptual framework from three sources: (1) West's (1990) concept of marginalization within national polity, in his theory of cultural politics of difference; (2) Sharpes' (1989) three dimensional framework of combining political, economic and social realities in the study of local realities and (3) Rigby's (1985) treatise on nomadic societies in transition.

These perspectives shed light on those positive aspects of social formation, ethnicity and sociopolitical realities in a cultural setting central to the proposed research. Rigby's approach, for example, demonstrates that pastoralism is more life-enhancing in its qualities of family unity and sense of belonging than for which it is generally credited. Thus, the present study differs from previous ecological studies on pastoral nomads because it uses a subpopulation as unit of analysis. Taper (1987) has suggested appropriately that we ought to consider groups, such as 'tribe' and not 'state', as tendencies, or models of organization, articulated within the cultures of a given society, and their inward and outward manifestations (p. 89). The concepts of subpopulation as groups, cultural difference, and life-enhancing pastoralism illustrate an analytical tool with which to understand educational efforts, particularly the efficacy of literacy programs among nomadic pastoralists. These concepts suggest an emic approach or an insider's view of local realities (see Spradley, 1979; Spindler, 1970; Wagner, 1991).

Method and Sample

Building on a field study undertaken in Tanzania in 1988-89, this study examined data collected from a sample survey of 480 adults in Northern Tanzania. Follow-up visits to the area enabled the researcher to conduct further interviews among members of two communities of the Maasai. Based on the previous field study, these communities were identified as sufficiently diverse and reasonably broad-based venues for this investigation. Together they provide a characterization of the whole spectrum of nomadism. The first group -- the Maasai of Longido, represent a section of the pastoral community with a high degree of nomadism. They are relatively detached and isolated from their neighbors. This group of Maasai has minimally responded to schooling and literacy programs. Few out-of-school youths and adults successfully complete literacy classes. By contrast, the second group -- the Maasai of Monduli, show a lower degree of nomadism with more literacy gains, but nevertheless fall far behind their sedentary and settled neighbors.

Subjects for the ethnographic interview were selected from these two communities. They included individuals who participated in the national literacy programs. Names of these individuals were obtained from the district office or local schools, which continued to play the role of literacy centers. Starting with the children at schools within these communities, I made a list of informants. School children from the two communities led me to their parents or neighbors who had enrolled in national literacy programs. From the initial list of informants I identified the most likely candidates for interview. I plan to make further visits in the future to complete the next steps of this study.

The overall objective of this project is to collect data on: (1) migration patterns, (2) family uses of literacy, (3) design of flow of information and knowledge in the pastoral community, and (4) sources of information -- both from within the community and externally -- about drought, livestock diseases, and family health. In the Summer 1993, I examined relationships between

schools and community, literacy events such as reading, and writing, and availability of reading materials like books and newspapers.

Findings

The findings reported here focus on the analysis to date of the general characteristics and common beliefs of the two Maasai communities interviewed and observed. A description of their literacy environment provides background for further observations and interviews for this research in progress. The findings established that the median age of those interviewed was 41 years, with ages ranging from 18 to 79 years. Regarding years of schooling, one third of the participants did not attend formal schooling at all; many had dropped out of the literacy classes between 1981-85. Participation and attendance to literacy classes was minimal. On occasions the Maasai attended when government officials visited their community and a head count was necessary. Classes were held at the local school. Attending a class meant walking long distances and time was lost in long distance travel. Even though women were the majority of those attending literacy classes in other districts, most women in Maasailand did not attend at all. Regarding the use of media, many of the Maasai youth had a radio set but few of these sets were in good working order, due to lack of repair or batteries. Newspapers, leaflets, posters -- advertising as well as informational -- were rarely seen in the local shops or village markets.

Books were rarely used outside the context of school. Sometimes students brought notebooks home from school. But this practice was to be avoided because of long distances students must walk or in case of bad rainy days and floods. There were very few occasions that the parents were required to go to the school in connection with their children. Instead, they were encouraged to send their children to a boarding school in the area but they were not in favor of seeing their children leave home for an extended time. They resisted these overtures by making excuses. Few teachers in the local school came from the community. This did not

seem to bother residents. The reasons given seem to indicate that the school was a government enterprise and the community had nothing to do with it.

Local traditional learning systems were closely linked to the Maasai community's survival needs. They transmitted in a holistic way a body of relevant values, practices, and indigenous knowledge needed for the survival of the community. The local language of Kimaasai was widely used in most everyday conversations and transactions. Collective skills and values, rather than individual ones, were stressed. Discussions with clan elders revealed that all members of the community had access to, and were expected to, participate in the learning process enshrined by the Maasai culture, mostly controlled by the clan elders. Exclusion for economic or political reasons was rare. Most knowledge, skills, and attitudes were orally transmitted from generation to generation through stories, folklore, and examples of heroes and heroines from the community.

Overall, the Maasai confirmed the distinction made about the two types of pastoralists: agro-pastoralist and nomadic pastoralists. The practice of nomadism is an esteemed lifestyle. The individuals interviewed affirmed that those young Maasai who can cope with the demands and pressures brought to them by ecological factors of drought, scarce grasslands, shortage of water, and hostile environment must be rewarded by the community. In short, ability to move about with the animals and to bring them back safely was considered ingenious and praiseworthy. Stories of heros and personalities were often told as examples of superb navigation skills and mastery of the wilderness. In short, nomadism was positive and not negative as often believed to be by individuals outside the Maasai community.

Discussion

The findings paint an important picture of the literacy environment of the Maasai -- one of the largest migratory groups of East Africa. The findings show that their social, cultural, and

political environment continue to exert considerable influence on their everyday literacy practice. Materials and information to nurture a literacy environment were scarce and unavailable in the community. Media such as newspapers, leaflets, and books for different reading groups were scanty in the local shops in the village and in the homes. In spite of the low availability of media in the community, the community did not lack valuable information. Other sources, like oral traditions -- stories, folklore, and exchange of information by word of mouth were most prevalent.

The picture that emerges from these findings, even though not conclusive -- as the study progresses -- is that the literacy environment in terms of books, rural libraries and literature, looked very grim and impoverished. The extensive use of the local language, Kimaasai, was evidence that the local community continues to rely on traditional ideals as part of their indigenous knowledge and heritage which is built around their nomadic lifestyle and survival. In spite of the claim that Swahili is spoken by 98 percent of the Tanzanian population, the reluctance to use Kimaasai as part of literacy campaigns shows that national programs may not be reaching these subpopulations effectively, as would be assumed to be the case.

Furthermore, this study shows that even though the historical, cultural and political obstacles gravely affected the introduction of educational programs to the Maasai, cultural factors are equally dominant. The literacy environment in pastoral communities remains undeveloped and few target programs exist. Because the Maasai are a closely connected community with rich customs and oral traditions, it becomes difficult to envisage an educational system that ignores this rich culture. After informal discussion with elders and out-of-school youths, it became evident to me that traditional learning systems among the Maasai were closely linked to each community's survival needs. Unfortunately, these traditional learning systems were not considered when planning national literacy programs. As it may be typical to other parts of Africa and other developing countries, the imposition of alien educational systems, often at the expense of existing traditional learning systems, may have alienated the Maasai. There seems to be some

preoccupation with the notion of permanent settlement instead of seeking to understand the nature of the Maasai's indigenous knowledge and how it could be used to bridge literacy education and everyday usage. Enormous pressure continues to be exerted on the Maasai. It is argued that because of recurring, cyclical climatic changes, disease, and demographic shifts, the Maasai must be constrained in their movements and traditional practices. Introduction of alternative land use practices, including farming, commercial ranching, and wildlife reserves seem to dominate the list. Such regulations seem to spur a lot of old resentments and resistance in the Maasai community. Signs of resistance have been on and off since the earliest arrival of Westerners in Maasailand in the 1900s. Intervention programs such as introduction of boarding schools, cattle ranches, cattle dips, and mission schools, were used as methods of settlement and introduction to agricultural practices, but with little or no success. During the early post-independence period, the provision of literacy education in the national language was perceived by planners as a means of promoting integration into the national polity. For many years, to varying degrees pastoral nomads have defied this incorporation. The decrease of pasture land in neighboring Kenya, and the introduction of land tenure system is perhaps an attempt to force pastoralists to settle. This approach to development seems to confirm findings by Nkinyangi (1981) and Sarone (1984) that government efforts in the pastoral areas ignore the culture of these people and programs are either ad hoc or largely based on trial and error. These conflicts demonstrate clearly that a new approach is necessary to understand the issues of incorporation of marginal societies into national development plans. Other issues relevant to the study of subpopulations must be examined.

Conclusion

To conclude this essay, I must return to the original objective. The description I have provided in this paper should serve only as an interim report of a research in progress. The

findings documented so far are not conclusive to assume causal relationships or to establish a theoretical framework. However, the questions I raise point to the areas of concern and critical analysis. The assumption is that analysis of the elements in the migratory lifestyle and the pastoral subculture of the nomadic Maasai will bring to bear the relevance or irrelevance of basic education and literacy programs. The implications for such analysis rest with the possibility of applying the methodology developed to examine similar migratory lifestyles such as those lived by urban and rural wonderers, Arctic migrants, and other remote area dwellers.

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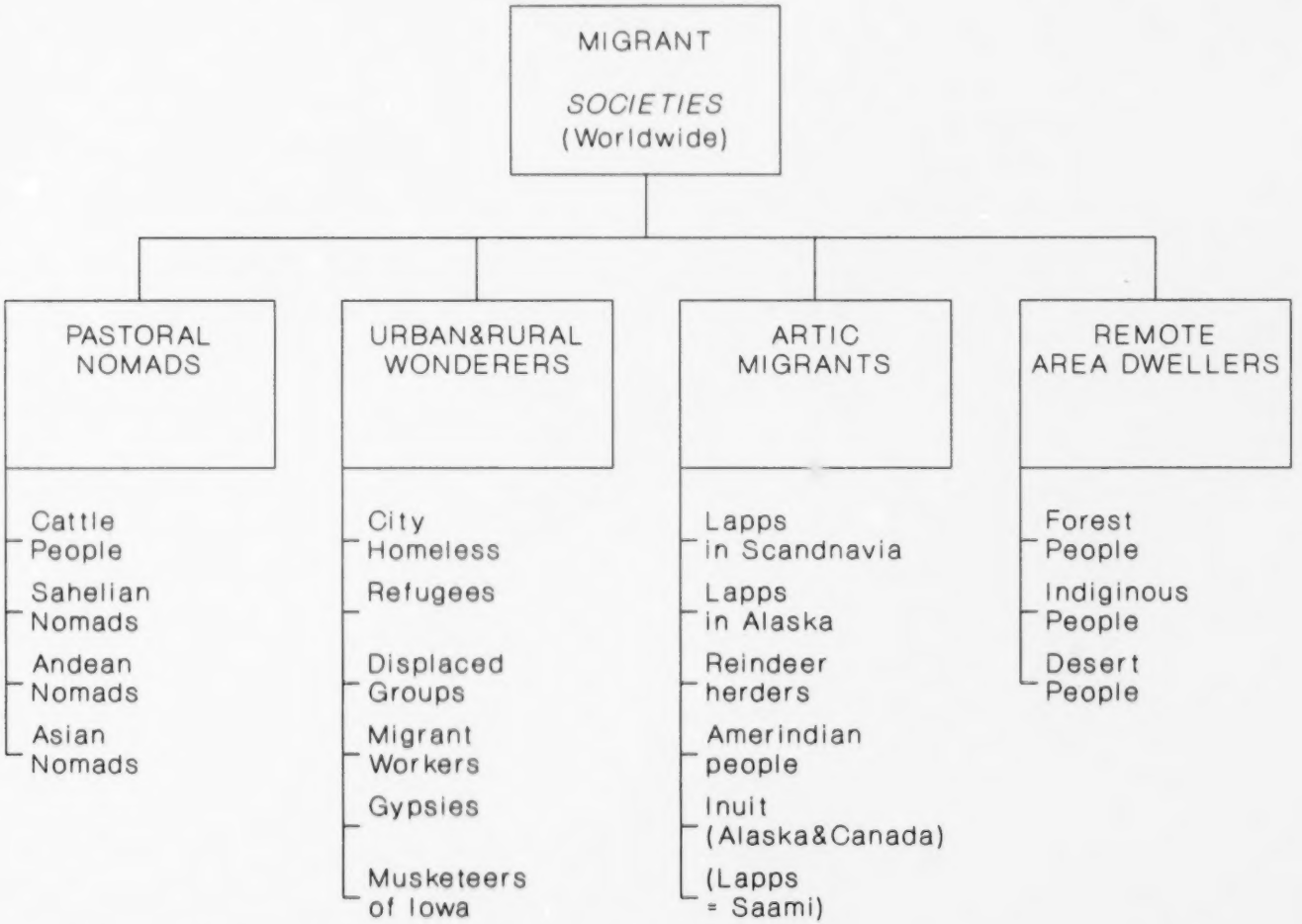
APPENDIX A

MIGRANT AND TRANSIENT SOCIETIES



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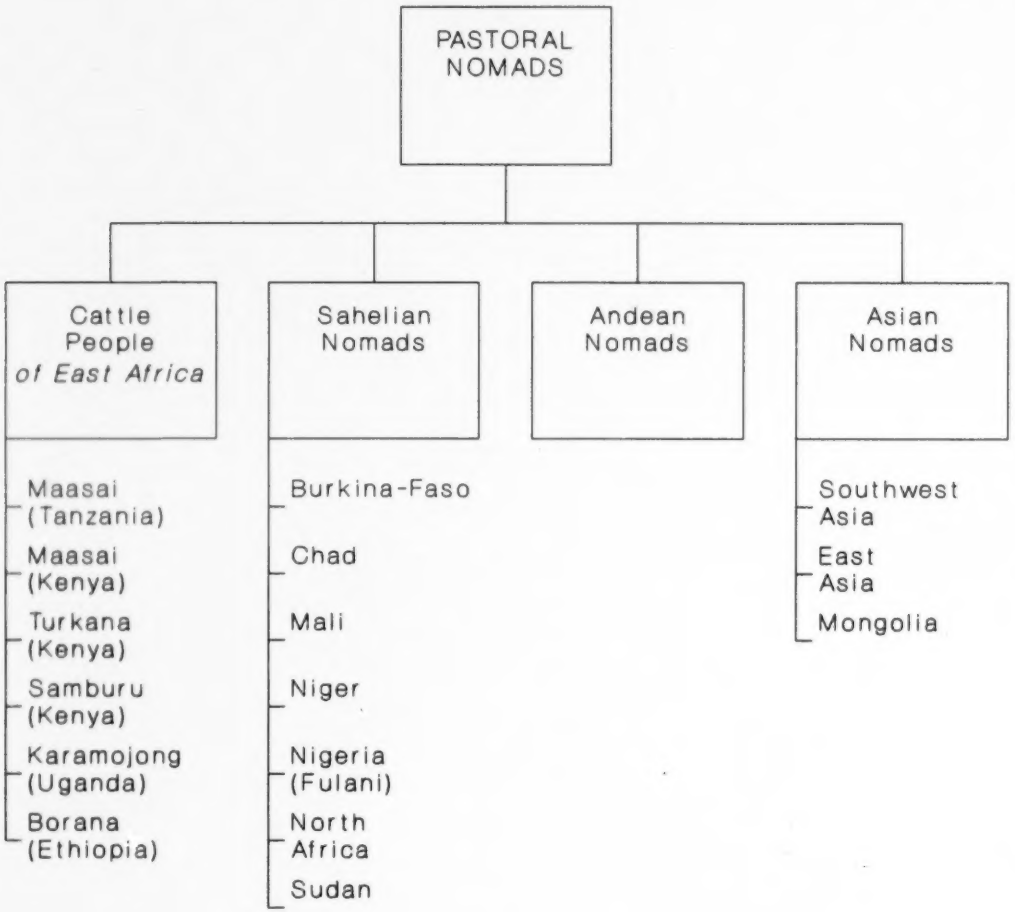
APPENDIX B

MIGRANT AND TRANSIENT SOCIETIES



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